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## ART BUCHWALD

## Quelle Surprise! An American in Paris!

*Art Buchwald has taken a few weeks off. He left behind several columns he found in his trunk.*

## PARIS

**O**ne of the rarest species in France these days is an American tourist. No one can remember the last time the French saw one, and so I caused a sensation when I arrived in the French capital.

As soon as I checked in at the Hotel George V, I noticed that things had changed for Americans in the last few years. First, the concierge broke into tears, then the doorman ran to tell the bartender, the bartender called up the chef, the chef told the waiter. Everyone came out to see if it was true that an American had checked into the hotel.

They stood around in a circle. "C'est formidable," said the chef. "It is an American. I would know one anywhere."

The young page stared as if I were a man from Mars.

The bartender said to him, "It was before your time, son, but once Paris was filled with thousands and thousands of people just like this."

"It's true," the waiter said.

"They were everywhere. You could see them at the sidewalk cafes, in the shops, at the Folies Bergère and the Lido. At one time there were so many of them there weren't enough hotel rooms to take care of them."

The page looked as if the waiter were putting him on.

The concierge said, "He is not lying, son. You couldn't get a taxi because of the Americans. You couldn't get into a restaurant or a nightclub. They had money to burn."

The doorman wiped his eyes as the memories came back. "They were so numerous we took them for granted."

The bartender shook his head. "They liked their martinis very dry."

The waiter said, "They always talked pidgin English, thinking we would understand them."

The chef said, "I never saw one without a camera."

"They could never keep the French money straight."

"They made terrible jokes about Frenchwomen."

"But they had hearts of gold."

The manager finally broke it up. By this time word had gotten out that an American tourist was

actually in the country and the press started to arrive.

The lobby was jammed with newspapermen and cameramen fighting to get near me.

They were shouting questions such as, "Why did you come? Was your plane forced down by bad weather?"

"Are you really an American tourist or do you work for the CIA?"

"Who paid you to come to France?"

"As the first American tourist to come to France, will you grant the prime minister an audience?"

While the press conference was going on the police arrived. The lieutenant came up and saluted. "The minister of the interior has ordered us to protect you while you are here. As the only American tourist in the country you have been declared a national monument."

I couldn't help but be touched.

The last thing I heard was that they want me to ride in the lead car in the parade down the Champs Elysées on the 14th of July. I guess I'll do it, for no other reason than to keep the memory of the American tourist alive.

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